

Open Distance Learning System: A Critical Reflection on the Issues, Challenges and Opportunities of Open and Dual Mode Universities in India

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(Received 26 December 2018; Revised 17 January 2019; Accepted 10 February 2019; Available online 16 February 2019)

Abstract - The Open Universities and Dual Mode Universities in India are catering millions of Open Distance Learners (ODL) through its chain of Regional Centres and Learner Support Centres (Study Centres) across the country. In order to improve the Gross Enrollment Ration (GER), the regulatory bodies should act as facilitator rather than the administrator or inspector. Today, Open Distance Learning (ODL) offered by the Open Universities and Dual mode Universities in India is at cross roads because of multiple control and regulation by several regulatory bodies of the Central Government. A new approach is needed by the regulatory bodies as well as the Govt. of India to remove obstacles put forth by various Regulations restricting the very access of open and distance learning to reap the demographic dividends in the country. This paper critically analyzes the aspects that affect the ODL being offered through Open and Dual mode universities. The paper also critically highlights the challenges being faced by the ODL institutions as well as the opportunities available to them. The paper also touching the latest global trends related to distance and digital learning.

Keywords: Distance Education, Open Universities, Dual Mode Universities, Open Distance Learning (ODL), Digital Technology, Online Learning, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

I. INTRODUCTION

The outer world in which the higher education system in India operates is ever changing due to technology driven society and high operating costs in the Universities and Institutions of Higher Learning today. These changes are ultimately influencing the life of the citizens and the economy of the country. The rapid growth in the field of information technology and the big data is influencing the world of work. The man-machine conflict in the work place is growing higher and higher by each passing day. The relationship between the employee and employers is blurring. Today Universities are compelled to respond to the changes that impacting the social, cultural, political, economic, technological fronts and to give due attention to the employability skills. The reduction in government spending on higher education has given a level playing field to the private higher education and the private universities have overtaken the public universities in the recent years. Their numbers are still growing and now reached at 334 against 399 State Universities and 48 Central Universities as per the data released by the University Grants Commission. In the past decades, the average standards in the college and

University education have been falling down drastically and lowered the quality of delivery because of such rapid expansion. The importance of Open Distance Learning (ODL) could be gauged from the fact that as much as 15% of tertiary learners are getting their higher education through the distance mode through Open Universities and Dual mode Universities. ODL has enormous potential to reach the unreached learners who discontinued formal education on account of economic or social compulsions and millions of young adults who simply unable to secure admission in the colleges and universities due to high percentage cut off. The ODL mode of higher education is always seen as inferior to conventional campus based learning. Such a public perception could be changed by the Open and Dual mode Universities through appropriate steps to improve the quality of delivery, innovative digital and blended learning etc. ODL institutions are catalyst for change as they are pioneer in introducing technologies in higher education.

II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF DEVELOPMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

The UNESCO (October, 2000) Analytical Survey: Distance Education for the Information Society: policies, pedagogy and professional development by the Institute for Information Technologies in Education (IITE), Moscow, USSR “The establishment in the United Kingdom of the Open University (UKOU) in 1969 had a major influence which led to the setting up of distance teaching universities in a number of countries mainly in Europe and Asia. These include the *Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia* (UNED) in Spain (1972), the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU) in Pakistan in 1974, the Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) in Thailand (1978), the Korea National Open University (KNOU) (1982), the Universitas Terbuka (UT) in Indonesia (1984), and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in India (1985). Following the closure of traditional universities over the 10 year period of the Cultural Revolution in China, the Central Radio and TV University system (CRTVU) was set up in 1979, based on remote teaching, using satellite broadcasting and on provincial TV Universities. The history of correspondence and distance education demonstrates some of the enduring characteristics of this form of learning: its

diversity in terms of level and students, ranging from primary to higher education, from young children to mature adults; the subjects taught, as various as shorthand, mining, and general education; the range of methods used, including correspondence, print, radio and TV, practical work, open examinations; the variety of countries where it has been established (developed, developing, large and small); and the way in which it has responded to social and historical challenges (distributed and displaced populations, imperialism and independence, war and revolution, industrialisation). In the new millennium as we moved towards the Information Society, distance education has been playing an increasingly important role and continues to demonstrate its flexibility and diversity”.

"Open and Distance Learning (ODL) offers a number of advantages to both learners and to providers of opportunities for learning. Problems such as distance and time, which are barriers to conventional learning, are overcome in open and distance learning. Open and distance learning can overcome problems of physical distance for (a) learners in remote locations who are unable or unwilling to physically attend a campus; and (b) learners and teachers geographically separated in that teachers in urban settings instruct learners in rural settings. Open and distance learning can accommodate low enrolments over a long period of time; and low enrolments in one geographic region but additional enrolments elsewhere. During the 1960s, policy makers were looking for ways and means of making education more democratic and professional. Distance education was a means of providing educational services to a large number of people who wanted to learn, but who were unable or unwilling to take time out for traditional forms of education. The didactic framework of higher education could be significantly enlarged by the addition of an alternative to traditional forms of education where learners could study independently within the control and supervision of higher education institutions".

A. Open and Distance Learning Institutions:

1. *"Single Mode or Open Universities:* Prominent Open Universities such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (India), Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (Thailand), Open University (England), Open Learning Agency (Canada) are single mode Universities which only offer only open and distance mode courses. These universities have schools or faculties like any regular mode universities with faculty members only concentrating course writing, preparation of reading materials, production of online contents etc. Programmes are delivered through Study Centres and controlled by Regional Centres with an academic staff (either Regional Director or Assistant Regional Director) to coordinate the contact programmes or delivery of contents to the enrolled students.

2. *Dual Mode Institution:* Offers two modes- one using traditional classroom-based methods; and - one using distance methods. This may also offer the same course in both modes, with common examinations; regards the two

types of learner as distinct: on-campus and external; and may or may not allow 'cross-over or migrations' registrations. Some Central University which is dual mode Institutions includes University of Delhi, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, and Pondicherry University. They operate through a separate Directorate of Distance Education or School of Open Learning. They have a direct linkage with their respective teaching departments in framing syllabus or course preparation and passing through the statutory academic bodies under the respective University Acts.

3. *Mixed Mode Institution:* Offers learners a wide choice of modes of study (a) independent, group-based or some combination; and face-to-face; maximizes flexibility of place and pace of study; (b) the result of 'convergence' of face-to-face and distance modes; and (c) increasingly characterizes organizations that were once 'single mode' or 'dual mode'. Deakin University and Murdoch Universities, both in Australia, provides examples of institutions that are now 'mixed mode'. At present no such Indian University is considered as mixed mode institution and chances are there, some private universities may emerge in the near future".

B. Three Generations of Distance Education: Garrison (1985) and Nipper (1989) argue that one way of looking at the history and successive developments in distance education has been to describe them as belonging to different 'generations'. Garrison (1985) and Nipper (1989) were among the first to use this term to describe three phases of distance education, 'which are linked historically to the development of production, distribution and communication technologies". The first generation was written and printed material and in 1950s dedicated TV channels were extensively used along with print and student assessment. The second generation was setting up of Open University of U.K. in the year 1969. For the first time integrated multiple media approach has been used for distance education even though the print medium was still in dominant. Operating cost was low which facilitated high penetration. The third generation of distance education has been use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) by Open and Dual mode universities. Use of internet and video conferencing were dominant.

III. THE CONCEPT OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Govt. of India in the year 2014 standardized the terminologies in education through the Indian Standard of Classification of Education (InSCED). The All India Survey Report on Higher Education (AISHE) brought out by the MHRD for the year 2017-18 defined the "Distance/Correspondence Mode i.e. Non-Formal system of Higher Education as "the system of imparting education through broadcasting, telecasting, internet, correspondence courses, seminars, contact programmes or the combination of any two or more such means of communication". "The term open and distance learning and its definition are

relatively new in the field of education, having gained prominence only in the past two decades. The language and terms used to describe distance learning activities can still be confusing, and geographical differences in usage. Among the more commonly used terms related to open and distance learning are the following: correspondence education, continuing education, distance teaching, self-instruction, adult education, technology-based or mediated education, learner-centered education, open learning, open access, flexible learning and distributed learning. Many university programmes have been renamed their correspondence programmes to open and distance learning”.

The following were some of the key terms and definitions coined by the Commonwealth of Learning (2015), *Open and Distance Learning: Key Terms and Definitions* for delivery of open distance learning by institutions and used in this paper:

1. *Distance Education*: is a mode of teaching and learning characterized by separation of teacher and learner in time and/or place for most part of the educational transaction, mediated by technology for delivery of learning content with possibility of face-to-face interaction for learner-teacher and learner-learner interaction, provision of two-way didactic communication, and acceptance of industrial process for division of labour, and economics of scale.

2. *Open Distance Learning (ODL)*: refers to a system of teaching and learning characterized by separation of teacher and learner in time and/or place; uses multiple media for delivery of instructions; involves two-way communication and occasional face-to-face meeting for tutorials and learner-learner interaction.

3. *Blended Learning*: is a teaching and learning approach that demonstrates blend of different methods, technologies, and resources to improve student learning. Examples are flipped classroom, online interaction followed by face-to-face teaching, online learning supplemented by face-to-face practical, etc. Flipped classroom is a form of blended learning where learners read or watch online lecture materials at home, before participating in interaction in a classroom environment.

4. *Flexible Learning*: opportunities provide more choices to the learners in terms of when, where and how they learn. Flexible learning may include use of online learning, work place-based learning, part-time learning, distance learning, and many forms of face-to-face teaching and learning with options to fast track and defer courses.

5. *E-Learning*: is an umbrella term that refers to learning design approaches that mix the best of both flexible learning and blended learning to increase learner engagement and improve learning outcomes.

6. *Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)*: is an online course available for large enrolment on the open web, where open largely refers to open registration, and not necessarily courses in open license.

7. *Online Learning*: is e-learning with a mandatory involvement of a digital network which a learner needs in order to access at least part of the learning materials and services. Online learning refers to network enabled teaching and learning that allows the learner to have increased interaction with content, teacher and other learners”.

A. *Need for Professional Development and Identifying Staff Development in ODL Institutions*: Robinson (2005) pointed out that “the vast majority of tertiary staff, while skilled in the more conventional forms of course and programme delivery, have limited experience of approaches which place student needs, choice and learning at the centre of the enterprise and use self-instructional materials in technologies ranging from print to the Internet”. “According to the circumstances, training needs analysis for staff development can be carried out in different ways and to different levels of detail. It can, for instance, consist of simply identifying ‘priority problems’ which might be soluble through training of different kinds and working out what training might be provided. It is, however, useful to look at training requirements from three different viewpoints: those of the individual, the job and the organisation. Undue emphasis on any one of these viewpoints to the exclusion of the others – to the needs of the individual, for example – can lead to provision which does not match organisational goals and needs. Robinson (1998) has provided a useful table of levels of training needs analysis, though she does admit that a very detailed analysis of training needs at the organisational level requires quite sophisticated skills of analysis, evaluation and diagnosis as well as access to information and people. She suggests that, if possible, the most effective strategy is to start at Level 1, the organisational needs and work through Level 2 towards Level 3, the individual needs”. In India, the training needs of University and College teachers are looked after by the UGC-Human Resource Development Centres (erstwhile Academic Staff College). There is a special need for specialized Orientation and Refresher courses for teachers engaged in ODL mode.

IV. HIGHER EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE GOALS

According to the UNESCO document on Higher Education and Sustainable Goals (2018) (<https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced/sdg47progress>), Higher education sector has undergone with a considerable change and a major transformation can be seen in the past one decade due to technological impact. The pedagogy and the way of teaching and learning in the Institutions of Higher Learning in India are not immune to these changes today. In order to sustain the quality, focus on access and equity, all such changes required for an overall improvement of delivery commensurate with the digital technologies. According to the UNESCO findings (2018), “Higher education is central to socio-economic development, and vital to competitiveness in an increasingly globalizing world. The principles guiding the Education 2030 Agenda: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and

lifelong learning for all underscores the importance of establishing robust quality assurance systems to address the above challenges. The wealth of digital educational resources has made new demands on higher education systems and institutions which include developing innovative curricula, study programmes and alternative learning pathways, and routes to higher learning, all facilitated by online, distance, open education, blended learning delivery models and short skills-based courses such as Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) and Open Education Resources (OERs). The potential of online learning in general, and in particular in the form of MOOCs, is enormous and builds new paths to higher education as well as expanding lifelong learning opportunities. It also helps to reduce individual and institutional educational costs by offering flexible alternatives”

V. NEED TO SUSTAIN STANDARDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Education Commission (1964-1966) had highlighted the issue related to content and quality and an outdated syllabus not suiting to the requirements of the students. The Commission felt that these had to be brought matching standards other developed country and meeting to the future challenges. The Commission had emphasized the dire need of higher education and fruits of the freedom. The report of the Commission exhorted the young people and literate public about the values and importance of college and university education which had a direct bearing on the overall development of the country. The educationist and policy makers who are broadly aware of the situation, ignoring this fact and they had become used to such conditions in the higher education scenario today. The net result is that even after five decades the position continues to remain the same in India.

The successive Union governments and its *regulatory bodies* like the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) etc. have continuously worked together and brought a general level of administrative efficiency. They have also partially successful in establishing the minimum standards of devoted work operation and un-bureaucratic promptness in field of higher education in India. Hence, the crisis today in the higher education sector cannot be attributed only to the public policy or administrative apathy by any organ of the Central Government like UGC or AICTE but it lies in our social structure in the Indian society at large. However, there is a momentum of continuous demand seeking greater accountability and transparency in higher education sector today by the main stake holder viz. students, civil society at large. Therefore, it has become imperative on the part of the Central Government to bring suitable regulations to maintain standards in higher education in government and private universities and institutions of higher learning equally in the larger interest of enrolled students and matching with the public policy on higher education.

A. National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 and Programme of Action (PoA), 1992: The NPE, 1986 and POA, 1992 emphasized for distance and open mode education and establishing open universities to provide educational opportunities to industrial workers, professionals, minorities, women and housewife and school or college dropouts. Equal emphasis was also given on lifelong learning. The open universities were seen as vehicles to navigate the system and democratize the university education through technological intervention such as Mass Media, dedicated TV channel etc. The IGNOU was given the responsibility of improving access to higher education through a number of programmes to reach the masses in the country and the IGNOU through its network of thousands of study centre did a fair job in liberating the higher education and was a great enabler to the deprived learners predominantly from the rural or semi-urban backgrounds, minorities, defense personnel who joined Armed Forces at a very young age as well as the working professional who were seeking professional attainment. The IGNOU through its number of postgraduate, graduate, Diploma programmes had helped the country to improve the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in the early 1990s. However the enrollment of students in IGNOU programmes is slowed down due to over regulations by regulatory bodies or non-introduction of new innovative programmes. Recently, the Supreme Court of India had to step in and give ruling in favour of IGNOU for the award of degrees in B. Tech. However, the students who acquired such degrees from IGNOU through approved institutions without stamp of approval by AICTE may still find difficulties in the job market.

B. Report of the Working Group on Higher Education for the Twelfth Five Year Plan, MHRD (2011): “Distance education system is emerging as an important means to cater to the increasing demand for higher education. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is recognized and accepted as an important mode for achieving enhanced access, developing skills, capacity building, training, employability, life-long education and continuing education. Open and Distance Learning has contributed significantly in development of education structure of India. It provides avenues to those students who are not able to leave their jobs or are not able to attend regular classes due to some reasons. Our distance education system consists of one National Open University namely, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and 14 State Open Universities. In addition, many Central/State Universities also offer courses through distance mode”.

C. Key Results of the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) Related to ODL: The last AISHE report for the year 2017-18 was released by the Government of India, MHRD on July 27, 2018. The report was based on the survey of 882 (out of 903) Universities, 39050 (out of 38061) Colleges and 10011 (9090) Stand Alone Institutions. The average of the institutions participated in the survey is encouraging as many as 97% of Universities and Colleges

have participated in the survey. While in the case of Stand Alone Institutions (SAI), it is 90%. Out of the 882 Universities, 343 were privately managed and 357 universities (40.5%) are located in rural areas. Although many of such universities located in rural areas, a large number of them are privately managed and cannot be said they have been catering the rural population of the country. Their location is based on the availability of institutional land at cheap rates to set up the campuses. As regards to ODL institutions are concerned, there are 14 State Open Universities, one private open university and one National Open University i.e. IGNOU. 110 Dual mode Universities are offering Distance Education and 16 of them are located in the State of Tamil Nadu. The total enrolment in higher education was 36.6 million with 47.6% girls. The distance mode students constitute about 11% of the total higher education with around 42% of girls. The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) was 25.8% in the age group of 18-23 years of age group. The representation of SCs and STs were 14.4% and 5.2% respectively. The enrollment of OBC students stands 35%. In the case of Muslim Minority students, the enrollment was 5% which is around 35% of their total population. However the representation of girl students stands 48% which is encouraging to note. However, the alienation of Muslim students in the formal education needs to be addressed. One of the reasons for such low enrollment is that a large number of un-recognized 'Madrasas' are operating in rural and semi-urban areas particularly in the State of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The youth population of both these northern States is quite high at this juncture. This requires immediate attention and strategy by the State and Governments. The enrolment in important programmes at UG and PG level in Distance Mode of education (as per the AISHE 2017-18) is that a large chunk of students were enrolled in B.A, followed by B.Com and B.Sc. programmes. Similarly in the case of PG programmes, high enrolment was noticed in M.A. programme, followed by M.Com, M.B.A and M.Sc. There is a steady decrease in enrolment for M.B.A. programme through distance mode of education. The trend may continue in the coming years because of tough regulatory measures taken by UGC as well as availability of opportunities for regular programme in the evening time offered by several privately managed and State Universities for the working professionals.

VI. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK IN ODL SYSTEM IN INDIA

Historically, the regulation of distance education was entirely left to the University concerned which offer the courses. But this position had changed when the Distance Education Council (DEC) under the umbrella of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was entrusted with the responsibilities of maintenance of standards of distance education course offered by State and Central Universities in the early 1990s. The DEC was created under a Statute framed under the IGNOU Act, 1985. Nevertheless, because of the teeth given by the Government of India and the UGC it had become a powerful body in the

field of Open and Distance Education. The MHRD with the consent of the UGC had jointly published a Gazette notification in which it was made mandatory for the Universities to seek recognition by the DEC for making eligible for the students for jobs under the Central Government. Initially the DEC had brought several State Universities which were offering distance or correspondence education under its fold. However when it touched the domain of prominent Central Universities like University of Delhi, it faced a stiff challenge and resulted in challenging its very authority given by the MHRD, UGC and AICTE through the Gazette notification before the Delhi High Court. The issue was such that the Ministry had to step in and suggest a alternative mechanism to regulate the ODL education in the country through UGC. The MHRD by using an emergency clause under Section 20(1) of the UGC Act had transferred the DEC from the control of IGNOU to UGC through an administrative Order on December 29, 2012. Simultaneously, the Statute framed under the IGNOU Act under which the DEC was established was repealed by the MHRD through the office of the Visitor of IGNOU i.e. President of India.

The Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development (274th Report presented to the Rajya Sabha on 16th March, 2016) observed that the DEC should be granted a statutory status to regulate ODL in the country. The Committee critically observed that the decision of the MHRD transferring the DEC from IGNOU to the UGC. According to the observations of the Parliament Standing Committee that the administrative action by the MHRD was not justified. Therefore, the Parliament Standing Committee suggested that Distance Education Council of India (DECI) Bill, 2014 proposed by the MHRD should be brought before the Parliament. In aim and objective of the DECI Bill, 2014 was "for the promotion and coordination of the Distance Education System in the field of higher education and for the determination and regulation of standards thereof and for other connected matter by the proposed DECI". Now the Bill has been shelved.

VII. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

A. Employability, Equity and Inclusive Education: The key concern for the open and dual mode universities, government and policy makers in India is improving the employability skills of learners. Recognizing the concern of the skill development, the Government of India had created a separate Ministry for Skill Development by integrating the erstwhile vocational education, directorate of employment and labour etc by linking skill with the higher education. MHRD and UGC have encouraged universities to start Bachelor of Vocational Education with exit opportunity for the learners. This is partially successful because of roadblocks created for the university institutions to bring the industry being the prospective employers to the university or colleges or institution of higher learning. The Directive

Principles of State Policy under the Indian Constitution provides equal opportunity to every citizen of the country. Therefore ensuring equity and inclusion are challenges before the policy makers, educators and institutions engaged in the delivery of higher education. There is a need to make inclusiveness by imparting education through the preferred medium such as Hindi, Regional languages, Urdu etc. rather than restricting such digital platforms in English. This would help to reaching the unreached in the remote localities of the country through appropriate mode of delivery. This would help to create lifelong spaces for learning to achieve the NPE and POA, 1992.

B. Technological Advancement: Digital technology is slowly changing the scenario of higher education globally. In one way such technological intervention is unlocking the doors of the accessibility and affordability in higher education especially in the ODL mode in India. The Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robotics is a big challenger to growing economies like India where a large population of young and educated youths searching for jobs after coming out from thousands of Engineering Institutions and Business Schools. According to the latest Survey by Mercer's 2019 Global Talent Trends Study, 88% of Executives in India predicts significant disruptions around their jobs as compared with 40% in 2018. The disruptive innovation is also started affecting the million of white collar job workers in the software and other service industry. Because of the systematic engagement and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the corporate world, a large number of workers are slowly losing their jobs to the machines. The disruptive innovation through digital technologies has created a direct impact on the employment opportunity in the country and disrupted the world of work. These innovations have already blurred lines between employer and employee and brought a considerable challenge to the Government at large.

C. Online Learning Tools: Universities as well as educators engaged in the Open and ODL should see an opportunity for flexible learning or retraining of the professionals or industrial workers or young students rather than a threat. These technologically advanced environments may vastly improve the quality delivery of education at the door steps or flipped classrooms or mobile learning or MOOCs or virtual learning methods. According to Gaskell (2019) "Distance Learning Institutions quite often the first institutions to explore and adopt the new technologies but their use is now widespread among campus-based universities, leading to increased competition for traditional and single mode distance teaching institutions". Gaskell (2018) "Despite the potential of ODL and Open education to transform higher education in Asia, challenges remain: certification across countries, the quality of MOOCs, sustainability and digital inclusion- as of December, 2017, only 48.7% of the Asian population in general had Internet access". But at the same time new technologies can "offer us powerful ways to achieve our shared commitments to each and every one of the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs)...they are not risk-free, and some inspire anxiety and even fear. They can be used to malicious ends or have unintended negative consequences" (United Nations Development Programme: *Sustainable Development Goals-Goal-4; Quality Education*)

D. Over or Excess Regulation: Teaching – learning process in the Open Distance Learning system is heavily depends upon multiple media of delivery of instructions with occasional face-to-face meeting for tutorials or learner-learner interaction. This cannot be equated with face-to-face learning through campus based universities. However, it is seen that the regulatory bodies with the responsibility of regulating ODL system in India has been prescribing Regulations after Regulations ever since the responsibility was shifted from DEC, IGNOU to UGC by the MHRD. Similar is the case of NCTE which regulates the Teacher Educator programme. These new guidelines are in a way acting against the potential learners who are otherwise gainfully employed or looking for up gradation of their skills. Uniform admission calendar may not be appropriate to ODL or Open Universities. This has also been affecting the number of enrolments and depriving their right to enrolment in a course of choice and many had to forego one full year. This is acting contrary to the very concept of open learning itself and consequently the GER may be falling behind. Besides, the financial planning of these Open and dual mode universities would be affected and may bring additional financial burden on the govt ex-chequer. It may be interesting to note that the NAAC accreditation does not cover the distance education units as Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) as per its guidelines. On the other hand, the UGC which is the parent body of the NAAC through its Regulations (DEB) bars all such HEIs whose score is less than 3.25 from offering distance education programmes. There are likelihood that the performance of such teaching staff of regular programme may impact adversely the teachers attached to the directorate of distance education in dual mode universities whom may otherwise perform well in their sphere. This is fundamentally flawed and such administrative decisions may be impermissible under the law as dual mode universities were established through a separate Act of Parliament or Legislature with specific mandate to offer regular or distance mode programmes. This has already brought resentment among the dual mode Universities be it a State or Central University and reflected in the academic senate or academic council of these universities. The point of argument advanced by the teachers of distance education is that it is rare that the University which scored 3.25 or above would not be interested in offering distance mode programmes. Rather all such top ranking universities which are considered as elite institutions and may be interested in concentrating on scientific research or student placement to retain its elite tag like Ivy league universities in the West. The UGC ODL Regulations, 2017 has made all open universities and dual mode universities to go for compulsory NAAC accreditation. Further as per the new UGC guidelines, all the distance mode programmes offered by open and dual

mode universities shall be on semester mode with same question papers. Such a decision taken by the regulatory bodies may be in one way raising the standards of distance mode programmes and brining a complete parity between the regular and ODL mode programmes. At the same time, a majority of ODL institutions may still not prepared or future ready. Such a sweeping decisions and high standards set by the Government would be costing the learners heavily and the flexibility being enjoyed by the learners are not going to be there in the future.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The National Knowledge Commission (NKC) in its Report to the Nation (2009 p. 90-92) had proposed radical changes in the system of ODL to achieve expansion, inclusion and excellence in higher education. NKC observed that more than one-fifth of the students enrolled in higher education were in the ODL stream and opined that ODL should spread beyond brick and mortar world. ODL should not be seen as a mode of educational delivery, but an integrated discipline engaged in the creation of knowledge. NKC also suggested that elite institutions such as Indian Institute of Technology, Indian Institute of Management etc. should consider some additional responsibilities of conducting distance education programmes at postgraduate level for the larger benefits working professionals who otherwise could not enter into such elite institutions. The main thrust of the NKC with regarding to ODL in the country was that in order to grow and prosper through high incomes with ample employment, development and execution of policies that focus on the acquisition of knowledge and skills by every citizen of the country and not just a select few. Therefore all regulatory bodies operating in the field of higher education should recognize the spirit of such recommendations by the NKC or National Education Policy. Any regulations or administrative guidelines framed by the instrumentalities of the Government of India should be flowing from its broad policy approved by its law makers or policies framed at national level after due consultation process. Otherwise such irrational decisions framed in the name of maintenance of standards by such bodies would be open for challenge in the Court of law which may create further impediment in the growth and expansion of ODL system in the country. Education planners and policy making institutions have to take cognizance of the demographic trends and enrolment patters based on data collected through the All India Higher Education Survey. Every State in the country has some peculiarities as far as the GER is concerned. If the policy makers do not take adequate attention to such aspects while making policy formulations, India cannot dream to be a knowledge economy and may lose the opportunity of reaping the demographic dividend in higher education. This may impact the economy of the county in the long run.

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